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SUBJECT: TIBET: DUTCH DIPLOMAT REPORTS TENSION, HEAVY
MILITARY PRESENCE IN LHASA JULY 21-25

REF: BEIJING 1210

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson,
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A Beijing-based Dutch diplomat (protect) who traveled to Lhasa and Shigatse July 21-25 told PolOff August 1 that tensions remain very high between Han Chinese and Tibetans, noting that working-level Han and Tibetan government officials he met with were openly contemptuous of one another. According to our Dutch colleague, many Tibetan residents of Lhasa predict violence during upcoming religious festivals. The diplomat observed "military" troops patrolling the Barkhor area at night in armored vehicles. People's Liberation Army and People's Armed Police forces were on every street corner, he reported. Tourists, mostly Han but a few foreign, are again visiting Lhasa. Some monasteries are open, but, our Dutch counterpart said, very few monks could be seen at religious sites. Meanwhile, a member of the EU Parliament also visited Lhasa July 19-22, but his trip was reportedly tightly controlled and Tibet government officials only repeated standard talking points blaming the Dalai Lama for the March unrest. End summary.

Dutch Bypass MFA To Win Permission for Visit

¶2. (S) Dutch Embassy First Secretary Job van den Berg (protect) visited Lhasa and Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), July 21-25 to inspect cultural preservation projects funded by the Dutch Government. Van den Berg arranged the trip through the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), which has authority over these projects in the TAR and said neither the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor the TAR Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), who he speculated would have likely vetoed the visit, was involved in arranging the trip. Van den Berg said he won approval based on the Dutch Embassy's contractual agreement with MOFCOM that a Dutch diplomat will be allowed to travel to the TAR at least once a year to inspect the projects. The TAR Department of Foreign Trade and Commerce (DOFTCOM) hosted him in Lhasa and Shigatse, and Van den Berg reported he enjoyed a high level of freedom during the trip. The ethnic Tibetan guide (strictly protect) DOFTCOM charged with minding Van den Berg was outspokenly critical of the Government and, rather than restricting Van den Berg as such handlers usually do, actively helped him gather sensitive information on conditions in Lhasa and Shigatse.

¶3. (C) Van den Berg, who last visited Lhasa in May 2007, said he was struck by the growing rift between

Tibetans and Han Chinese. Unlike during previous trips, government officials in DOFTCOM and other agencies made little effort to present a facade of ethnic harmony. Van den Berg was surprised to hear Tibetan and Han officials complain openly about each other in his presence, with Hans describing Tibetan colleagues as "ungrateful" and "primitive" while Tibetan cadres denounced the arrogance of Han colleagues and the "glass ceiling" that prevents Tibetan civil servants from gaining real authority.

Tibetans Predicting More Violence

¶4. (C) Van den Berg said he had extensive discussions with ordinary Tibetans and Han Chinese in Lhasa. He described the city as very tense with Hans and Tibetans largely avoiding one another. Van den Berg witnessed Han shop owners closing their stores much earlier than Tibetan-run businesses. Tibetan-owned shops also continued to display white katas (Tibetan greeting scarves) on their doors, a sign to would-be rioters that the shop is Tibetan-owned (reftel). Several Tibetans, according to Van den Berg, said they expected violence to erupt during upcoming religious festivals, such as the August 30 - September 5 Shoton Festival (Tibetan Yogurt Festival), and especially in March 2009, which will be the 50th anniversary of the 1959 uprising. Some Tibetans reported to Van den Berg that they were required to report their activities daily to security forces. Van den Berg's Lhasa

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contacts also said that Tibetans who receive an international phone call soon afterward receive a call from security agents demanding to know the identity of the foreign caller.

Heavy PLA/PAP Presence in Barkhor

¶5. (C) Van den Berg described a near ubiquitous People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police (PAP) presence in Lhasa. The Barkhor area around the Jokhang Temple was "ridiculously controlled" by PLA and PAP forces with four or more soldiers standing guard at every intersection. (Note: Van den Berg said he believed many, if not most, of the soldiers he saw in Lhasa were PLA. By his own admission, however, Van den Berg may not be able to distinguish between various PLA and PAP uniforms. "Everyone was wearing olive," he said. Van den Berg also saw Public Security Bureau Officers, including ethnic Tibetan police, but the PSB was clearly not in charge of overall security.) During the day PLA/PAP soldiers did not check identification of people entering the Barkhor, but ID checks were in place after 10 pm. While walking in the Barkhor late at night, Van den Berg saw troops patrolling the streets in an armored, wheeled "military" vehicle with two machine guns mounted on top.

¶6. (C) Despite this heavy security, Van den Berg commented, "life is continuing" in Lhasa and street stalls are open around the Jokhang Temple. He observed that Han tour groups were returning, though some Han tourists with whom he spoke expressed fear they might be attacked by Tibetans. Van den Berg reported a small number of Western tourists in Lhasa.

Dearth of Monks

¶7. (C) In addition to the Jokhang Temple, Van den Berg visited several monasteries, including the Sera Monastery outside Lhasa. However, the Drepung

Monastery, also near Lhasa, was closed. At all religious sites, Van den Berg said, he saw some pilgrims but very few monks. At Khadung Monastery near Shigatse, Van den Berg was able to speak with the head monk, but only in the presence of a younger monk from the monastery's Democratic Management Committee who interrupted when the conversation veered toward sensitive topics.

NGO Staff Beaten during Detention

18. (S) In Lhasa, Van den Berg spoke with two Tibetan staff members of a U.S. NGO, "The Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund" (strictly protect), who were detained in the wake of the March 14 riots. (Note: In addition to the USG, the Government of the Netherlands is one of the Fund's donors.) The two told Van den Berg they were severely beaten over the course of several days and that they were transferred in quick succession to several different prisons, including a military facility where the beatings were most severe. The two were eventually freed, but only after authorities held them for two more weeks so their bruises would heal and they would bear no marks of abuse upon release.

EU Trip More Controlled

19. (C) Also on August 1, PolOff received a briefing from EU Commission Political Counselor Alexander McLachlan on the July 19-22 visit to Tibet of EU Parliamentarian and Former Chairman of the EU Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee Elmar Brok. (Note: Neither McLachlan nor others from the EU Mission in Beijing accompanied Brok.) McLachlan described the trip as "worthwhile," despite the repetition of standard themes regarding Chinese sovereignty and the "evil" Dalai Lama. The trip came in the wake of a series of strongly-worded EU Parliament resolutions on Tibet as well as an announcement that the EU President will not attend the

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Olympics, and as such, represented a "positive voice" to counterbalance otherwise negative publicity, McLachlan said. The members of the delegation traveled in a personal capacity rather than as representatives of the European Union, and were sponsored by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA) as well as by their local Tibetan host, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Government Executive Vice Chair Padma Tsele.

United Front Works Department: No Compromise

110. (C) According to McLachlan, prior to traveling to Lhasa, Brok met in Beijing with United Front Work Department Vice Minister Si Ta, who has participated in recent dialogues with representatives of the Dalai Lama. Si Ta reportedly stressed the importance of national and territorial integrity and said that China has shown great willingness to meet with the Dalai Lama and has agreed to more contact. Si Ta said that recent talks focused primarily on the future role of the Dalai Lama, whom he claimed "does not want a stable Tibet."

Boilerplate Meetings in the TAR

111. (C) During Brok's Lhasa meetings, TAR Government officials and local Tibetologists rehashed standards points on Chinese sovereignty and the "evil" Dalai

Lama. Lhasa's Public Security Bureau (PSB) chief told the group that 18 innocent civilians had died during the violence (Note: which is consistent with some previously released figures, see reftel), but was unwilling to give a precise number of people arrested. The PSB Chief repeated standard points blaming the riots on "hooligans" and the Dalai Lama.

¶12. (C) McLachlan said that in all of his meetings, Brok stressed the need for meaningful dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama. In addition, he highlighted what he considered the root causes of the March 14 riots, in particular the poor economic opportunities for Tibetans who cannot speak Mandarin. This socioeconomic divide between Han Chinese and many Tibetans in Tibet, Brok told his TAR interlocutors, is one of the causes of instability. Despite repeated efforts to discuss these topics, Brok noted "no progress" in making his points understood.

Monasteries Still Closed, Few Foreign Tourists

¶13. (C) The delegation toured a series of Chinese-funded agricultural and industrial zone development projects and the Jokhang Temple. TAR authorities, however, denied Brok's request to visit a teaching monastery, claiming that they are "all closed." In contrast to Van den Berg's experience, Brok's delegation did not observe significant numbers of troops or riot police. While TAR authorities claimed that approximately 300 foreign tourists were in Tibet at the time, the delegation saw no other foreigners. TAR authorities reported that tourism was down 68 percent compared with 2007.

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